



LEAN IN

How women can respond to workplace microaggressions

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide

The
Women
at Work
Collection

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Women
at Work
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Meeting agenda

approx 90 mins

Member updates

15 mins

Watch video

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Reviewing strategies
- Activity 2: Workshopping resources
- Activity 3: Mitigating the impact

15 mins

15 mins

15 mins

One Action

10 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 5 mins on member updates
- Spend 15 mins each on activity 1 and activity 3

Getting started

Member updates

2 mins or less per member

15-20 mins depending on group size

Go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It's OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Read aloud to the group: I'm going to read a list of some common workplace microaggressions that research shows are faced by women more often than men. Raise your hand if this has happened to you:

- You were interrupted, ignored, or spoken over
- Someone questioned your abilities or judged you as less than capable at your job
- Someone "mansplained" to you (i.e., explained something to you that you are already expert in)
- You were left out of a social event that your men colleagues attended, e.g. a golf outing, a sports event, drinks at a bar
- Someone else got credit for your idea or work
- Someone assumed that your role was more junior than it really was
- You received comments on your emotional state
- Someone assumed you wanted to prioritize your family responsibilities over work
- You were expected to do "office housework" more often than men, such as note-taking, catering, or other tasks not in your job description
- You heard judgmental language about your personality, such as "abrasive," "aggressive," "too nice," or "lacking confidence"
- You were judged on how you dressed or presented yourself

Icebreaker (continued)

10 mins

Discuss icebreaker

- What did you learn from seeing other people's responses?
- Did anything surprise you?
- How did you feel about the experiences your fellow Circle members shared?
- Have you experienced any kinds of disrespect at work that aren't on the list?

“When you experience microaggressions, you need to take care of yourself afterwards. Recognize how you're feeling, name the emotion. Allow that feeling to be there. And then ask yourself, what can you do to make yourself feel better? Maybe it's writing a text to a friend or calling someone and just having a sounding board. Maybe it's going for a walk, maybe it's doing exercise.”

Zee Clarke, CEO and entrepreneur, author of *Black People Breathe*, New Mexico, USA (she/her)



Activity 1: Reviewing strategies

15 mins

Read aloud to the group: The kinds of disrespect we just talked about can be a common workplace experience for women, especially if you work in a role or industry where most of your coworkers are men.

Before we dive into this activity, know that it's always okay to **not** respond to a microaggression. It's fine to just focus on staying safe and taking good care of yourself. But if you do want to respond, research shows it can make you feel more empowered and in control.

Here are the main research-based strategies for responding:

- **State the facts** (e.g., tell someone your job title or qualifications in a simple, direct way and then move the conversation on)
- **Ask a question** that encourages the person to question their assumptions (e.g., researchers recommend asking, "What makes you say that?")
- **Follow up privately** with the person later, so that you have a chance to prepare.

Discuss as a group:

- Which of these responses have you used in real life?
- How effective were they? What was the impact of your response?
- Are there any other types of response to workplace disrespect that you would recommend?
- Which responses do you think would be most helpful to use in the future?

Activity 2: Workshopping responses

15 mins

- Think of time when you experienced a microaggression and wish you'd responded differently—or responded at all.
- Go around the room and share with the group what happened and what you wish you'd done differently
 - Then, if you feel comfortable, ask group members for their advice—what would they say in that situation?

“I’ve received many microaggressions over the years, and I’ve gotten better about speaking up. Early in my career, I would just shut down and be intimidated. Culturally, my father was the dominant person in the home, and when he raised his voice or when he wanted something, my mother would quiet down and I would quiet down. So when I got to the workplace, if a man interrupted me, I found myself doing the same thing, but knowing it was wrong, knowing that I need to be speaking up. But I didn’t have the courage. It wasn’t until I started to get involved with Lean In, and I started to learn about women being more interrupted in meetings than men are, that I became more able to speak up for myself.”

Anna Dapelo-Garcia, executive, healthcare industry, Lean In Network Leader, California, USA (she/her)



Activity 3: Mitigating the impact

15 mins

- Discuss as a group: How has the experience of workplace microaggressions impacted you?
 - Have your physical and mental health been affected?
- What strategies have helped mitigate the impact (e.g., talking to others, reminding yourself of your worth, basic self-care)?
 - What does self-care in your professional life look like? What does it look like in your personal life?
- Consider setting up a group chat with others in this group to share stories, advice, empathy, and validation (e.g., a Slack channel or WhatsApp group).
 - Research shows there are tremendous mental health benefits in talking to others who share important aspects of your identity about any disrespect you face at work.



“We were talking through the feasibility of opening a franchise nail salon. There was a gentleman in the group who just would not let me talk. Every time I asked a question, or every time I tried to talk through what nail consumers would be looking for in a nail salon, he just kept talking over me. I just open-endedly asked him if he's ever done his nails before, and he said ‘no’ and then got really quiet.”

Rima Fadlallah, entrepreneur and educator, Michigan, USA (she/her)

One Action

10 mins

- Think about one strategy you could use to mitigate the impact of workplace microaggressions in your own life (e.g., self-care or setting up a group chat to share stories).
- Commit to implementing this strategy the next time you experience workplace bias or disrespect.
- Share your commitment with your Circle (spending 1 minute or less per member).
- When you meet next time, you can check in and discuss how well the strategy worked.

Congratulations on a great meeting!

Notes

Notes